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# Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics

## Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission, for information, the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics. The Commission is requested to take note of the work carried out by the Working Group in 2005 and the plans for 2006-2007.

* E/CN.3/2006/1.

** *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 4* (E/2005/24), chap. I, sect. B.

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# Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics

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## Introduction

1. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics was established in 2003, following the decision of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session.[1] The objectives, terms of reference, organization of work and work programme of the group were endorsed by the Commission at its thirty-fifth session in 2004.[2]

2. The objective of the Working Group is to firmly anchor environment statistics as part of official statistics by improving and strengthening basic environmental data. That objective is accomplished by enhancing cooperation and pooling the knowledge bases and resources in the areas of methodological work, data collection and dissemination, training and capacity-building, and the organization of joint events.

3. The present report concerns the work carried out by the Working Group in 2005 and its plans for 2006 and 2007 in the areas mentioned directly above.

# I. Methodological work

4. In accordance with the work programme of the Working Group, the focus of methodological work in 2004 and 2005 was on water statistics.

5. The Working Group, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Monitoring System/Water Programme (GEMS/Water), held an International Work Session on Water Statistics in Vienna from 20 to 22 June 2005, at the invitation of the Austrian Federal Environment Agency. The Work Session was attended by 28 countries and by 13 international, intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations.

6. The Work Session was organized in nine sessions based on 35 working papers. Each focused on one of the following nine different aspects of water statistics:

(a) The need for water statistics: information for policymakers;

(b) Water statistics collected by international organizations;

(c) Water accounting: challenges and opportunities;

(d) Water resources statistics;

(e) Water supply and use statistics;

(f) Statistics on emission of pollutants to ambient waters;

(g) Statistics on wastewater generation and treatment;

(h) Statistics on water quality;

(i) Statistics needed for water pricing and expenditure of water.

7. The Work Session concluded that:

(a) Water statistics are a basic element of environmental information and should cover the fields of water resources, supply, use, treatment, quality and

economic aspects. Currently, the quality and accessibility of data do not meet the demand, a situation that needs to be remedied;

(b) Within countries, data providers and other stakeholders need to be brought together within integrated networks of experts so as to work together to collect the most needed data and to make optimum use of the data currently collected;

(c) Capacity-building for the collection of basic water statistics is required in many countries, some of which do not have statistical units dedicated to water or environment statistics;

(d) Water accounts provide a framework for diverse water data and are a powerful tool for water management. The implementation and use of such accounts should be promoted and supported both financially and technically;

(e) Feedback from international organizations on how data are used has to be given to the data providers;

(f) Regional and international organizations active in the area of water-data collection need to work more closely with each other to improve harmonization and reduce duplication;

(g) There is a need to improve access to and interpretation of data by applying standardized metadata;

(h) There is a need to provide standardized methodologies to be used to aggregate raw data to statistics and indicators.

8. The Work Session invited countries to:

(a) Institutionalize water statistics by establishing environment statistics or water statistics units or similar structures to undertake the systematic collection of water statistics;

(b) Create appropriate networks to bring together water-data providers and other stakeholders so as to ensure that the most needed data are collected and that optimum use is made of the data currently collected.

9. The Work Session recommended that the Working Group:

(a) Set up a subgroup to address the issues above, and to coordinate the work of international organizations on water statistics;

(b) Provide appropriate manuals and methodologies to assist countries in the collection of water statistics;

(c) Explore other possibilities for assisting countries in the continuous improvement of data quality.

10. The detailed report of the Work Session is available as a background document.

11. Following the Work Session the Working Group set up the Subgroup on Water Statistics with the participation of the United Nations Statistics Division, FAO, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNEP, UNEP GEMS/Water and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). The mandate and work programme of

the Subgroup were discussed and adopted by the Working Group at its fourth and fifth meetings.

12. The Subgroup on Water Statistics is currently engaged in the review of the compatibility of the water statistics questionnaires used by the international organizations and in the discussion of certain methodological issues connected with the use of the questionnaires. The Subgroup will undertake the review of the draft water statistics manuals and the water chapter of the revised *Glossary of Environment Statistics* and will test metadata standards for water statistics.

13. The mandate and work programme of the Subgroup are contained in the annex to this report.

## II. Data collection

14. The year 2006 will be the year for the biennial data collection. In March, the United Nations Statistics Division jointly with UNEP, will send out its questionnaire on environment statistics to countries, except for Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian countries, where the data collection will be implemented earlier to coordinate it with the timetable of the upcoming pan-European state of the environment report. The Statistics Division questionnaire will focus on water and waste statistics. The questionnaire has been revised based on lessons learned from the previous data collection and from regional experiences. Compatibility with the joint OECD/Eurostat questionnaire and the water accounting tables was further strengthened. The questionnaire was reviewed by the Working Group Subgroup on Water Statistics. The OECD/Eurostat joint questionnaire will be sent to their member and partner countries later in 2006. Data exchange agreements are in place with OECD and Eurostat and are being established with FAO. The results of the data collection will feed into the UNEP *Global Environmental Outlook*, the *OECD Environmental Outlook* and the pan-European state of the environment report, all due in 2007.

## III. Training and capacity-building

15. UNEP co-sponsored a training workshop on environment statistics organized by the United Nations Statistics Division jointly with the secretariat of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Senegal in March 2005. The Statistics Division co-sponsored the OECD Latin America and Caribbean Conference on Environmental Information for Decision-making.

16. Joint actions in training and capacity-building in 2006-2007 are being discussed currently on the basis of the work programmes of the members of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics.

## IV. Joint events

17. The next International Work Session organized by the Working Group will be held in the second quarter of 2007 and will focus on methodological issues of land-use and land cover statistics. The Work Session is planned to be held in Rome and hosted by FAO (subject to confirmation).

## V. Meetings of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics in 2005 and meeting plans for 2006

18. The Working Group met three times in 2005, back to back with the aforementioned International Work Session on Water Statistics, the Eurostat Directors Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts held in Luxembourg in November and the OECD Conference on Environmental Information for Decision-making held in Mexico in December. The reports of these meetings are available as background documents.

19. FAO joined the Working Group as a member in November 2005.

20. The next meeting of the Working Group is planned to be held back to back with the Expert Group Meeting on Environment Statistics to be organized by the United Nations Statistics Division in New York in the second or third quarter of 2006. Regional commissions with advanced environment statistics programmes will also be invited to future meetings of the Working Group, starting with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

## VI. Work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics in 2006-2007

21. In 2006-2007, the Working Group will focus on:

(a) Continuing methodological and harmonization work in the subject area of water through the Subgroup on Water Statistics;

(b) Setting up a new subgroup on land-use and land cover statistics for the discussion of methodological issues in this subject area and starting preparations for the next International Work Session;

(c) Reviewing the draft chapters of the revised United Nations Statistics Division *Glossary of Environment Statistics* with a view to considering joint work on Working Group inter-institutional glossary;

(d) Developing a proposal for harmonized metadata for environment statistics and testing this in the subgroups on water and land statistics;

(e) Organizing the international work session on land-use and land cover statistics in 2007;

(f) Deciding on joint training and capacity-building actions on the basis of the shared work programmes of the member organizations.

*Notes*

[6] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. IV, para. 2 (b).

[7] Ibid., *2004, Supplement No. 4* (E/2004/24 and Corr.1), chap. IV, para. 2 (c).

## Annex

# Mandate* and work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics Subgroup on Water Statistics

1. The International Work Session on Water Statistics, organized by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics in Vienna in June 2005, recommended that the Working Group set up a Subgroup on Water Statistics to coordinate the work of international organizations in the area of water statistics, and in particular:

(a) To ensure that regional and international organizations that collected water data worked more closely with each other to improve data availability and harmonization and to eliminate duplication;

(b) To clearly define responsibilities, so that countries would need to send data to international organizations only once;

(c) To improve access to and interpretation of data derived from its disparate and distributed sources, by applying standardized metadata;

(d) To provide and promote use of standardized methodologies to be used to aggregate raw data to statistics and to indicators;

(e) To promote awareness within countries of why international organizations collected water data, and provide feedback on how data were used and the benefits of this use internally and externally.

The Working Group at a meeting following the International Work Session in Vienna agreed to set up a voluntary subgroup focusing on issues related to statistics on freshwater.

2. The Working Group discussed the draft mandate and work programme of the Subgroup on Water Statistics in Luxembourg on 9 November 2005, and in Cancún on 1 December 2005, agreed on the following.

3. The mandate of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics Subgroup on Water Statistics will be: to foster a close collaboration between the parties involved in the collection and compilation of statistics on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of freshwater resources and their use:

(a) With the aim of assuring complementarities of international data collection, removing redundancies, and sharing data and country information between all parties;

(b) With a view to supporting country efforts in developing water statistics (including data collection, data treatment, quality assurance, publication and dissemination) through appropriate sharing of experiences, promoting of best practices, and capacity-building.

4. The work programme of the Subgroup should include the tasks listed in the present annex.

* As revised after the fifth meeting of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics.

5. The United Nations Statistics Division, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme Global Environment Monitoring System/Water Programme agreed to participate in the work of the Subgroup. Other interested international organizations involved in water data collection were welcome to contribute to the work of the Subgroup. Country experts would be consulted on a thematic basis when needed.

6. To the extent possible, the Subgroup will work electronically. Consideration should be given to holding its meetings back to back with other meetings in order to limit costs.

7. The mandate of the Subgroup ends on 31 December 2007. The Subgroup will submit an annual report to the meeting of the Working Group on progress achieved. After consideration of the 2007 report, the Working Group may consider extending the mandate of the Subgroup beyond 2007.

## Tasks for the Subgroup on Water Statistics

1. To work out a comparison and concordance of water-related terms and questionnaires, which would reveal any conflicting definitions and terminology and serve as a first step towards harmonizing and standardizing the various water questionnaires; and to produce a common glossary of terms, which would be the natural outcome of a concordance.

2. To discuss and resolve existing conflicts and overlaps in definitions and data collection.

3. To develop a standard codification for water data.

4. To test the feasibility of harmonized metadata guidelines for environment statistics in the area of water statistics.

5. To assess methods for aggregating or otherwise progressing from individual measurements of water quality to useful statistics. If the Subgroup deems it useful, this could involve organizing a survey of countries for the purpose of asking how the measurement data are used by policymakers and obtaining ideas on water-quality classes (for example, drinking-water, fishable, usable for agriculture) or water-quality indicators.

6. To assess the feasibility of providing estimation methods and/or default coefficients that can be used to derive water data from existing data, so as to help countries estimate missing water data.

7. To contribute to the preparation of water statistics manuals/methodological guidelines.

8. To contribute to the preparation of training materials.

9. To initiate shared training activities, if deemed appropriate.